

SOME FACTS ABOUT INDIA

INTERVIEWS WITH LORD ISLINGTON
DURING NOVEMBER, 1916.

BY
ROBERT SLOSS.

LONDON :
BURRUP, MATHIESON & SPRAGUE, LTD.
1917.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2014

Some Facts About India.

I.

INTRIGUE IN THE UNITED STATES AGAINST THE PEACE OF INDIA.

Various rumours, charges and counter-charges as to the state of affairs in India have been rife of late, and I made these the subject of considerable inquiry at the India Office, with the purpose of obtaining for the *Daily News* an authoritative British statement of the position. Lord Islington, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for India, kindly consented to answer my questions, the first of which was :

“ Is it true that the United States have been used as a base of operations designed to overthrow British rule in India ? ”

“ That a number of disaffected Indians were collected in San Francisco, in August, 1914, to sail for India ‘ with the express object of waging war against the Government in India and of expelling the British, using murder, dacoity, seduction of troops and other similar measures to

achieve their objects,' was the conclusion arrived at by a Special Tribunal appointed to try a number of conspirators in what is known as the Lahore Conspiracy Case," said Lord Islington. "The Trial was held in public in 1915, and the published judgment states that in May, 1913, Hardial commenced to stir up inflammable material in America into a state of hostility towards the British Government; and proceeded, with others, to conspire and prepare for an insurrection in India, with the object of overthrowing the Government established there, at some date to be determined in the future.

"In pursuit of this conspiracy, meetings were held in various places in America; and a revolutionary paper, the *Ghadr* (which means "Mutiny") started in San Francisco. With the aid of sympathisers and agents and the sedulous distribution of inflammatory literature, many recruits were obtained in the Far East, particularly in Shanghai; and men were induced to throw in their lot with this revolutionary movement in Shanghai, Hong-kong, Manila, Penang, Singapore, Siam and in India itself. Eventually, the inflammatory material in Shanghai and in

America burst into flame in July and August, 1914; the approximate causes being the *Komagatu Maru* affair and the breaking out of war with Germany, the latter being regarded as giving opportunity for the commencement of the war which had been advocated in the *Ghadr*.

“ In July, an armed gang of men sailed from Shanghai for India. In August, a larger armed gang of men, collected in Oregon and elsewhere, left San Francisco, arriving in India in November. Other armed gangs also left America and Shanghai for the same purpose, picking up *en route* to India recruits for the revolutionary force.

“ Some of the revolutionists made an armed demonstration on November 25th, 1914, at Lahore Cantonments; and then moved to Ferozepore with the intention of assaulting the arsenal there, but in an encounter with the police, were captured or dispersed. Others seduced troops, villagers and students manufactured bombs and ammunition and secured arms and committed dacoities with murder. Attacks on railway communications were also planned and attempted. As a final

act of the war which was to overthrow the British Government, a contemporaneous rising of troops and other revolutionists was planned to take place on the 19th February in Lahore, Ferozepore, Ambala, Meerut and other places. But owing to the police obtaining information in time, this movement was checked."

"Had the revolutionists any connection with Germany?" I asked.

"The Tribunal came to the conclusion," was the reply, "that there were indications of a possibility of some definite understanding between Germany and Hardial, and evidence of the readiness of Germans to assist the revolutionists whenever they could. One witness said he was told that 'the German Government was behind Hardial, and that many of the arms, brought by the returning emigrants, had been supplied by Germany.' Another witness was told in Penang that 'Germany would provide arms and ammunition and would otherwise help the revolutionists.' The Tribunal stated that the evidence does not prove judicially that there was a clearly defined arrangement between the revolutionists and

Germany. To establish such a connection would be well-nigh impossible on the evidence then before the Tribunal; but it does strengthen the opinion the Tribunal recorded 'that there is a possibility of such connection, and we are quite satisfied that the outbreak of war with Germany was regarded as the psychological moment for a revolution in India, in which it was expected Germany would participate.'

"It may be noted that when Hardial left San Francisco he went to Berlin. The *Ghadr* newspaper is still in existence and is edited by Ram Chandra."

II.

WHY THE BRITISH NAVY IS ACTIVE ABOUT THE PHILIPPINES.

As certain actions of British warships in the neighbourhood of the Philippines have been attributed here to the existence of gun-running plots at Manila, the purpose of which is to strike at British rule in India, I asked Lord Islington what knowledge he might have of such a situation.

“There has for years been a small Indian community in the Philippines,” said Lord Islington, “consisting of men who have gone on from China. Many of these are employed as watchmen at Manila, while others live by peddling. They are peaceable and inoffensive people who, when let alone, had no thoughts of political conspiracy. In 1911 they had occasion to invoke the good offices of the British Consul-General, as a concerted movement against them was started by certain Filipinos, who accused the Indians of systematically kidnapping Filipino children for purposes of cannibalism as well as immorality! Indians were attacked and pelted in the streets, and the movement was actually supported by certain local newspapers. The Consul-General, of course, gave a sympathetic hearing to the complaints made to him, and the Administration displayed a cordial and energetic attitude which soon put an end to the trouble. The resident Indian community probably never numbered more than 300, but during the last five years a number of Indians have gone to Manila in the hope of obtaining an easier entrance to the United States by

a short residence in the Philippines, and have generally asked the British Consul-General for help to enter the United States, which of course was quite out of his power to give, though the applicants may not always have believed this. The Immigration Laws and Regulations, alike of Canada and the United States, have prevented the entrance into North America of many uneducated Indians who had been attracted by talk of high wages, and for some years past all the Far Eastern ports have had a floating Indian population, labouring under a sense of grievance against the European race generally, who were ready to give ear to any clever agitator. The political *côtterie* of Indians established in California, which uses the privileges of freedom conferred by American laws and ideas to print and disseminate among Indians elsewhere a systematic gospel of murder, has naturally seen its chance here, and has sent its papers widespread to Indians in Japan, the Chinese ports, and the Philippines. The outbreak of the European war brought in the Germans as active patrons of the Indian seditious movement and reinforced the coffers of

the Indian politicians in California. A branch Indian revolutionary society is known to have been established at Manila, which is, geographically, a convenient centre for a campaign of organisation, the apparent idea being to get in touch with Indians in Japan, China and Siam, and with German agents in China and the Dutch East Indies. Java and the Philippines, in fact, offered the best facilities for establishing the revolutionary organisation on neutral territory, and the Philippines have the marked advantages of a more central position and of constant and free communication with the conspirators in the United States, while it is at least possible that it was hoped to establish arms depôts without the knowledge of the American authorities in unfrequented spots in the islands, which might serve gun-runners as a half-way house between China—where the Germans can give arms to Indians—and India. The Manila revolutionaries' secret society is known to be divided into classes according to the degree of initiation, and it has been stated that every member of one class binds himself to murder at least one British official."

“ What is the attitude of the American authorities toward these plots ? ” I asked.

“ Of course,” said Lord Islington, “ the seditionists know that the American authorities in the Philippines will not knowingly tolerate any campaign of murder. But they are there, and the ease with which political agitators travel round the Pacific on neutral ships compels the British Navy to keep a close watch for the transmission of emissaries and cargoes of arms. For the object of all these plotters is to start an armed insurrection in India—as can be seen by the repeated mendacious announcements of Ram Chandra, editor of the San Francisco *Ghadr*, that armed rebellions on a large scale have broken out in India. If the Navy relaxed its patrol work, communication would certainly reach India and be established with the dupes of the agitators in India or Singapore. It must be remembered that the Indians in the Far East have been given, by the *Ghadr* and by German agents, an entirely mistaken account of the course of the war, and that consequently their mental attitude is not so very unlike that of the Indian jungle

tribe which was told, and believed, that the Kaiser was about to arrive in India in an aeroplane.

“A certain Bhagwan Singh, at one time a priest at the Sikh temple in Hongkong, where he did not acquire an overwhelming reputation for sanctity, has for the last few years been travelling between British Columbia (whence he was expelled before the war), California, Japan, China, and Manila, and a person of this kind, absolutely without scruples, yet, in the eyes of many Indians who do not know his record, a holy man, can and does arouse fanaticism and race-hatred amongst impressionable and ignorant Orientals who, in the absence of such incitement, want only to earn their living and go their own way unmolested.”

III.

BRITISH RULE IN INDIA.

As allegations of British misrule in India have been fairly prevalent during the war, I asked Lord Islington if he cared to say anything in rebuttal.

“Allegations of misrule can be made, and are made, against every Government,” said Lord Islington. “The British found India in a state of chaos on the gradual break up of the Moghal Empire. There was the same disorder in India a century and a half ago as there is in Mexico to-day. But it was less easy to let India alone to evolve order as best it could, because the British had as rivals other European competitors who might not only have established order but have destroyed British trade, which was the special object of our presence in India. Since the British have been in India they have striven both to preserve order and to improve the education and the general welfare of the people. It is a difficult task, for there are 320 million inhabitants and they vary in degree of civilisation from aboriginal jungle tribes to such highly cultured poets and philosophers as Sir Rabindra Nath Tagore, who was recently awarded the Nobel Prize. And it cannot be supposed that satisfaction is given everywhere. But these facts may be considered : that all the revenue raised in India is expended on India, and India does not contribute to the British

exchequer; that railways, irrigation canals, postal facilities and agricultural developments are constantly improving the material welfare of the people; and that as they are becoming better educated they are being admitted in continually increasing numbers into the higher administrative posts. Mr. Roosevelt, in the rôle of candid friend, criticised British administration in Egypt. Of India he said: 'It is easy enough to point out shortcomings, but the fact remains that the successful administration of the Indian Empire by the English has been one of the most admirable achievements of the white race during the last two centuries.' "

"Do you consider that Germany has any designs upon India?" I asked.

"For years past," said Lord Islington, "the Germans have been working eastward, acquiring a greater and greater influence over the Turks; possessed of the idea of a Berlin-Baghdad railway with a port on the Persian Gulf; and intent also on causing pressure on Egypt. Their theory seems to have been that the British were decadent and not fit to govern India, and their practice during the

present war has shown that they intended to cut communications with India in Egypt and to work through Persia and Afghanistan to attack the British in India.

“ British administrators are well aware that there are shortcomings, and they do their best to make them good. But as regards many of the allegations of misrule made at the present time, Americans must be well aware that they are circulated as part of the German propaganda for a definite German purpose. Some of the people in this country have criticised the system of Government in India as they have criticised the Government of their own country. This is a characteristic of a free and self-governing community of a kind that the Germans do not understand. But our enemies seize hold of these outspoken comments, and circulate them, in a distorted form, through their own agencies, for the purpose of doing the British harm, but without any thought of the welfare of India.”

“ You mean to imply that Germany’s interest in India is not wholly philanthropic ? ” I suggested.

“ It is worth reflecting on the question as to whether the Germans, who are so fond of criticising our rule in India, would have done any better themselves,” said Lord Islington. “ We only have to look at their conduct before the war, and during it, to find the answer. In Europe, before the war, they shamefully maltreated the minor races of the German Empire, such as the inhabitants of Schleswig-Holstein and the Poles. As regards the latter, no scheme was left untried for denationalising them and robbing them of their native spirit and ideals. It is notorious that the attempt to dragoon their subject races in Europe into the Prussian mould has been a lamentable failure. The same applies to German behaviour abroad. The atrocities committed in South West Africa, in the campaign against the Hereros, are well known to all. The principle appears to have been that the Germans can only colonize by annihilating the original inhabitants, and, since the war, papers have been published showing the hostile attitude of the Germans towards the Moslems in German East Africa. In Europe the German record during the war is a sufficient

proof that they are unfitted to govern the less advanced races. In dealing with their highly civilised neighbours, the Germans have not scrupled to adopt any form of barbarity that might serve their immediate purpose. What can be expected of them when they are dealing with ignorant uneducated tribes incapable of voicing their feelings or invoking the assistance of civilised powers ? ”

“ What are India’s prospects for self-government ? ” I asked.

“ While I cannot help making these comments on the German claim to be regarded as a colonizing power,” said Lord Islington, “ I should wish Americans to understand that the British are far from regarding the system in India with complacent self-satisfaction or as representing an unchanging state of affairs. The Government of the United Kingdom is progressive. So is the Government of India. Within the last few years important measures, with which the names of Lord Morley and Lord Minto will ever be associated, were taken for increasing the scope and powers of the Indian Legis-

lative Councils (containing a large elected element of Indians) which are associated with the Government of India and the Provincial Governments. This is only symptomatic of the change that is going on in India, where the movement for giving Indians a wider part in the administration of their own country is sympathetically viewed by the Authorities. When the Report of the Public Services Commission (of which I was Chairman) is published, as it shortly will be, I am confident that Americans who are interested in this aspect of Indian rule will find cause for satisfaction. Progress in self-government is necessarily slow. It moves in accordance with the advance of education and with the capacity for administration. Any attempt—however well meaning—to force the pace would be fraught with the gravest danger to the welfare of India. But I would say that we can see no finality to the degree to which the admission of Indians into the higher ranks of the public services and the responsibility of the Councils may be carried in conformity with the capacity of the people of India to undertake administrative responsibility and subject

to the over-riding interests of the people of India as a whole.

“ While, therefore, I cannot see any alternative to the British rule in India, Americans will understand that I have no static conception of what form this rule must take. As years go on, it will continue to be inspired by the free spirit that characterises Great Britain and the United States and which is exemplified in the American administration of the Philippines.”

